

Does Washington want war with Russia?

24 April 2014

Does Washington want a war with Russia? A review of recent US actions surrounding the crisis in Ukraine clearly poses what would have once seemed an unthinkable question. The Obama administration is playing a very dangerous game of Russian Roulette.

In the last 48 hours, the Pentagon has announced the deployment of US paratrooper units to Poland and the three former Baltic republics of the Soviet Union—Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania—bringing US troops to Russia's very border. Another American warship has been dispatched to the Black Sea and more US forces are slated to deploy to Ukraine itself this summer under an exercise known as Operation Rapid Trident.

These military moves by Washington are unfolding in the context of an acute crisis within Ukraine that, thanks to the machinations of Washington and its puppets, threatens to erupt into full-blown civil war.

Less than one week after signing a joint statement with Russia, the US and the European Union in Geneva pledging to end all violence in Ukraine and disarm illegal groups, the US puppet regime in Kiev has ordered its military to carry out an “anti-terrorist” crackdown against the restive Russian-speaking population in the country's industrial southeast. To that end it has dispatched not only troops, tanks and warplanes, but also armed thugs from the neo-fascist Right Sector.

The Putin government in Moscow, which has desperately searched for an accommodation with Washington, appears to be waking up to the deadly seriousness of the situation. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned in an English-language interview with the state-run RT television channel Wednesday that his government would treat an attack on Russian citizens in Ukraine as an attack on Russia itself. He raised as a precedent the August 2008 offensive launched by the government of Georgia on Russians in South Ossetia, to which Russia responded by intervening militarily to repel Georgian forces.

The implication that the Russian government would carry out a similar intervention to stop Ukrainian troops from slaughtering Russian-speaking civilians in the Donbas region should be treated with the utmost seriousness.

In the interview, Lavrov also observed, referring to the actions of the government in Kiev, that “the Americans are running the show in a very close way.” This is indisputable. The regime itself is the product of a protracted American intervention in the country's internal affairs, with some \$5 billion in so-called “democracy promotion” funding pumped into Ukraine since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

These efforts culminated in the fomenting of a right-wing opposition movement to destabilize the Russian-aligned government of President Viktor Yanukovich by means of street violence. When a deal was brokered between the opposition and Yanukovich, Washington ensured that it was scuttled and the elected president overthrown by fascist paramilitary forces.

The prime minister of the regime brought to power by the February 22 fascist-led coup, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, was handpicked by US officials, who affectionately referred to him as “Yats.”

The point person for this operation has been US Undersecretary of State for Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland, a former chief security adviser to Vice President Dick Cheney and the wife of Robert Kagan, the founding chairman of the Project for a New American Century. She has brought to Ukraine and to Russia itself the same policy of aggressive war that was implemented in the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

The way in which Washington calls the shots has been demonstrated in an even more sinister fashion with the launching of the first abortive “counterterrorist” operation in the Donbas in the immediate aftermath of a covert trip to Kiev by CIA Director John Brennan, and then its resumption in the immediate aftermath of this week’s visit by Vice President Joseph Biden.

From start to finish, the Ukraine crisis has been instigated by US imperialism. Every action Washington has taken has been directed at exacerbating and intensifying this crisis. The longer this crisis goes on, the clearer it becomes that US policy is directed not so much at Ukraine as at Russia itself. Ukraine, it would seem, is meant merely to provide the pretext for a war with Russia. ?

Short of that, it would be used to force a humiliating capitulation by Moscow that would only set the stage for redoubled aggression aimed at Russia’s dismemberment and transformation into a powerless semi-colony.

Presumably, those in the White House and the Pentagon believe that such a conflict would stop short of a nuclear war, but who knows?

The threat of a US war on Russia is also apparent in the flood of war propaganda being unleashed upon the public. Vladimir Putin is being subjected to the same kind of demonization previously reserved for Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi, while the State Department and its faithful scribes at the *New York Times* serve up “photographic evidence” of Russian troops in Ukraine that has all the authenticity of similar “proofs” of Iraq’s “weapons of mass destruction.” ?

What underlies the US war drive? In the run-up to the Ukraine crisis, Washington had grown increasingly incensed by Moscow’s role in blocking US war plans against both Syria and Iran, not to mention Putin’s granting of asylum to NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden. Earlier, there was the fiasco that Moscow dealt Washington in the US-backed 2008 war launched by Georgia against South Ossetia. The events in Ukraine suggest that US imperialism has embarked on a strategy to eliminate Russia as an obstacle to its drive to assert hegemony over the Middle East and, more broadly, the landmass of Eurasia.

There are also internal factors driving Washington to war. Social contradictions within the United States have reached a dangerous intensity. Masses of working people continue to bear the brunt of the capitalist economic crisis, even as Wall Street recoups its losses from the 2008 collapse and grows richer than ever. More and more fingers are pointing at the super-rich as the party responsible for unprecedented social inequality and misery in America.

As so often in the past, war provides an external outlet for internal social pressures and the danger of domestic unrest. Under conditions of overwhelming popular hostility to military intervention, one thing is certain: a war with Russia would rapidly lead to the shredding of the Constitution, the abrogation of democratic rights, the outlawing of political opposition and a massive escalation of police state measures.

The greatest danger would be to underestimate the threat of war. Even if it is averted or postponed in the immediate instance, the profound contradictions of the imperialist system make the catastrophe of a nuclear Third World War not just a danger, but an inevitability, outside of the working class mobilizing its strength internationally in a unified movement to put an end to capitalism.

It is to prepare such a struggle that the International Committee of the Fourth International and the *World Socialist Web Site* are holding an International May Day Online Rally on May 4. We urge workers and youth from every country to join in this common forum and discussion on forging the international revolutionary socialist movement that is so urgently needed. Register today at internationalmayday.org.

Bill Van Auken

Copyright © 1998-2016 *World Socialist Web Site* - All rights reserved

Who is responsible for the catastrophes in the Middle East?

30 June 2014

"The United States of America is not responsible for what happened in Libya, nor is it responsible for what is happening in Iraq today," Secretary of State John Kerry declared at a Cairo news conference held in the midst of his recent crisis tour of the Middle East.

As Kerry spoke, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and a growing Sunni insurgency were consolidating their grip over the north and west of Iraq, including the country's borders with Syria and Jordan. Upwards of a million Iraqis had been displaced by the fighting, and thousands had been killed in the mounting sectarian slaughter.

Libya is in a state of complete collapse, with continuous fighting between rival militias, a government that exists in name only, oil production down by at least 80 percent, and over a million people forced to flee the country's violence. Many thousands are incarcerated in a network of prisons run by armed groups that practice systematic torture.

Kerry's statement merely made official the steady drumbeat from the political establishment and the media since the situation in Iraq turned into a complete debacle: "The US bears no responsibility."

Typical was the commentary by *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof, a "human rights" imperialist who was a vocal proponent of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. He wrote: "The debacle in Iraq isn't President Obama's fault. It's not the Republicans' fault... overwhelmingly, it's the fault of the Iraqi prime minister, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki."

Maliki, the stooge put in power and kept there by the US occupation, is made the fall guy.

Thomas Friedman, the *Times*' foreign affairs columnist, wrote Sunday that Maliki is an "arsonist," who, "the minute America left Iraq," deliberately unleashed mayhem. This is the same Friedman who in 2003 declared that the US invaded Iraq "because we could," spoke proudly of US troops going house-to-house and ordering Iraqis to "suck on this," and declared that he had "no problem with a war for oil."

Listening to the chorus of statements insisting that the US has no responsibility for the deepening tragedy inflicted upon the people of Iraq and Libya, one is reminded of nothing so much as the Nazi war criminals at Nuremberg, from Hermann Göring on down, rising one-by-one in the dock to declare themselves "not guilty."

What are the crimes for which Kerry and so many others in the ruling establishment insist Washington bears no responsibility?

The description that they used for their own actions at the time was "shock and awe," the unleashing of colossal destructive force upon a society already shattered by a decade of sadistic US sanctions. Killing hundreds of thousands of people and turning millions into refugees, the US war and occupation destroyed every institution of Iraqi society, while Washington deliberately fomented sectarian divisions as a means of overcoming Iraqi nationalism. The country's deposed ruler, Saddam Hussein, was tried by a drumhead court and unceremoniously executed.

All of this was justified with warnings about the imminent threat from “weapons of mass destruction” and ties between Baghdad and Al Qaeda. As the whole world now knows, it was all lies.

There were no WMDs and there was no Al Qaeda in Iraq until US imperialism overthrew the country’s government and tore its social fabric to pieces. In fact, there was no Al Qaeda at all before Washington set about inciting a bloody war by right-wing Islamists in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

In Libya and now in Syria, the Obama administration abandoned the “war on terrorism” pretext for an equally cynical and fraudulent justification for regime-change: “human rights.” In Libya, the US and NATO heavily bombed the country while organizing and arming Islamist-led militias in a sectarian war that destroyed all of the existing governmental and social structures. As in Iraq, it ended its war with the brutal murder of the country’s secular leader, Muammar Gaddafi.

Washington is carrying out a similar war for regime-change in Syria, backing Sunni Islamist and sectarian militias that are led by ISIS, the same force that has overrun much of Iraq. The US hopes to end this war with the assassination of a third secular Arab head of state, Bashar al-Assad.

Just last week, Obama proposed to funnel \$500 million in arms to the Syrian “rebels”—weapons that everyone knows will end up in the hands of ISIS, which the US is supposedly committed to defeating in Iraq.

As the contradictions and deceptions of Washington’s policy become ever more glaring, US officials simply act as though the American people won’t notice, or will believe anything. Or, for that matter, they won’t see that \$500 million can be conjured up instantly to pay for a criminal war, while working people are being told “there is no money” for health care, education, housing or jobs.

The destruction that the US oligarchs have wrought in the Middle East, with all of its terrible human consequences, is the external manifestation of their destructive role within the US itself—smashing up the country’s manufacturing base, turning its economy into a gambling casino for financial parasites, destroying the jobs and living standards of millions of people. With no answers to the growing crisis at home, they turn to violence abroad, only compounding the catastrophes they have created overseas.

The “not responsables” and “not guilties” from Kerry, Kristof, Friedman and the other advocates and apologists for American military aggression won’t wash. US imperialism is responsible for terrible crimes against humanity.

Yet no one has been held accountable. Not those in Washington—Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice, Powell, et al.—who conspired to wage a war of aggression; not those in the current administration, from Obama on down, who conspired to shield their predecessors and continue the same predatory policies; not the military brass who carried out the war; not the private contractors who enriched themselves off of it; not the lying media that helped foist the war onto the American public; not the cowardly and conformist academics who justified and went along with it.

Together, they are responsible for the catastrophes that have been inflicted upon the peoples of Iraq, Libya and Syria.

Bill Van Auken

Seventy-five years since the outbreak of World War II

1 September 2014

Today, September 1, 2014, marks the 75th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II. The German invasion of Poland was followed two days later by the British and French declarations of war against the Third Reich.

The human and social catastrophe that began with the Nazi bombing of Warsaw ended six years later with the United States' atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the intervening six years, between 80 and 90 million people were killed, and additional hundreds of millions of people were physically and emotionally crippled.

Military deaths totaled between 22 million and 25 million, including the deaths of 5 million prisoners of war.

The human cost of the Second World War was far greater than the First, which itself had taken between 9 and 16 million lives. A mere 21 years separated the end of the first global bloodbath and the onset of the second.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 arose out of the contradictions of world capitalism that exploded in World War I, and the war itself was essentially brought to an end as a consequence of the socialist revolution in Russia.

Over the subsequent two decades, the international working class suffered a series of defeats due to the betrayals of the Stalinist bureaucracy that arose within the Soviet Union and the treachery of the social democratic parties. Fascism triumphed in Italy, Germany and Spain.

The Fourth International, led by Leon Trotsky, warned that the alternatives facing mankind were socialism or barbarism. The only force that could prevent a new world war was the proletarian revolution. The defeats of the working class in Europe, Trotsky wrote, made such a war inevitable.

One year before the outbreak of World War II, Trotsky, in the founding program of the Fourth International, warned of the coming cataclysm. The bourgeoisie, he wrote, "toboggans with closed eyes toward an economic and military catastrophe."

World War II was not, as the propagandists of American and British imperialism claimed, a "war for democracy" against fascism. It was an imperialist war that arose out of the fundamental unresolved contradictions of capitalism that had erupted in the First World War: the conflict between world economy and its division between antagonistic nation states, and between socialized production and private ownership of the means of production.

The Hitler regime instigated the war in Europe. But the Nazi Reich was only the most extreme expression of the destructive and criminal nature of imperialism. The ruling classes of all the imperialist powers, major and minor, including the United States, Britain, France, Japan, Italy, Canada and Australia, were involved in a struggle to redivide the world and increase their control of raw materials, markets and sources of cheap labor at the expense of their rivals.

In the course of the six years of war, the horrors included the virtual extermination of European Jewry,

itself part of Hitler's war of annihilation against the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union lost 27 million people, 14 percent of its population. Poland lost 5.8 million, more than 16 percent of its population. Countries that lost at least 10 percent of their populations included Greece, Lithuania and Latvia.

Some 6 million Jews were murdered between 1939 and 1945, including 90 percent of Jews in Poland, the Baltic countries and Germany.

In Asia, Japanese imperialism carried out a murderous campaign to seize control of the Pacific and colonize China. But the methods employed by American imperialism to bring about Japan's capitulation in August of 1945 were of a completely barbaric character. Over the course of three days, the US dropped atomic bombs on the defenseless and militarily insignificant cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The death toll from the two bombs was 150,000 people.

As the American historian Gabriel Jackson wrote in his 1999 book *Civilization and Barbarity in Twentieth Century Europe*, "In the specific circumstances of August 1945, the use of the atom bomb showed that a psychologically very normal and democratically elected chief executive could use the weapon just as the Nazi dictator would have used it. In this way, the United States—for anyone concerned with moral distinctions in the conduct of different types of government—blurred the difference between fascism and democracy."

The American ruling class viewed its victory in the war as opening the way for US imperialist domination of the world. But its ambitions were frustrated by the existence of the Soviet Union as well as the anti-colonial struggles that swept Asia, Africa and Latin America, above all the socialist revolution in China. US imperialism responded brutally.

It is estimated that in the wars that followed—Korea, Vietnam and the numerous smaller wars associated with the Cold War—some 20 million people died.

Following the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Kremlin bureaucracy the United States not only declared an end to the Cold War and the triumph of capitalism, it also promised a "peace dividend." Nothing of the kind occurred.

The American ruling class officially adopted a policy of global hegemony. It seized on what it called the "unipolar moment" to escalate its use of military force, hoping thereby to offset its economic decline. From the fall of the Berlin Wall until the end of the 1990s, the US invaded, bombed or occupied a series of countries, including Panama, Somalia, Iraq, Haiti, Sudan, Afghanistan and Yugoslavia.

Washington seized on the September 11, 2001 attacks to proclaim a "war on terror" that was nothing more than a cover for the use of military force all over the world. It adopted a policy of preventive war, granting itself the right to attack any country it deemed an obstacle to its global interests.

The financial crisis that erupted in 2008 accelerated the drive by the imperialist powers for a new division of the world. The savage wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were followed by the wars for regime-change in Libya and Syria. Now, the US has launched a new war in Iraq and is preparing to bomb Syria.

Under conditions of mounting social tensions and deepening economic crisis, the imperialist ruling classes are recklessly pushing the conflict over Ukraine, triggered by an American and German orchestrated fascist-led coup in Kiev, to the point of open warfare between NATO and Russia, which holds the world's second largest nuclear arsenal.

The US-led offensive in Europe is aimed at transforming Ukraine into a base for military operations against Russia, which is to be carved up and reduced to a semi-colony of American and German imperialism.

On the very eve of the 75th anniversary of the beginning of World War II, government and military leaders in Europe met to escalate the provocations and threats against Russia. The European Union summit held over the weekend pledged to increase sanctions on Moscow while NATO leaders called for Ukraine's integration into the US-led imperialist military alliance.

Dalia Grybauskaite, the right-wing, US-backed president of Lithuania, a NATO member country, declared Saturday that Russia was already at war with Ukraine and the whole of Europe.

Anne Applebaum, the neo-conservative *Washington Post* columnist and wife of the Polish foreign minister, published a column Sunday bearing the headline "War in Europe is not a hysterical idea." The column concludes by asking, "So is it hysterical to prepare for total war? Or is it naive not to do so?"

Meanwhile, in the East, US imperialism is carrying out an offensive aimed at reducing China to a colonial status, under the banner of the Obama administration's so-called "pivot to Asia." The logic of the drive to isolate China and surround it militarily is outright war.

In the 1938 founding program of the Fourth International, Trotsky wrote: "Under the increasing tension of capitalist disintegration, imperialist antagonisms reach an impasse at the height of which separate clashes and bloody local disturbances (Ethiopia, Spain, the Far East, Central Europe) must inevitably coalesce into a conflagration of world dimensions."

Substituting Iraq and Syria for Ethiopia and Spain, these words written 76 years ago provide a concise summation of the world political situation today. This time, however, the prospect is for a nuclear world war that could put an end to human civilization.

As the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) declared in its statement "Socialism and the Fight Against Imperialist War," issued on June 9, "Another imperialist bloodbath is not only possible: it is inevitable unless the international working class intervenes on the basis of a revolutionary Marxist program."

The lessons of history must be learned. Nothing can stop the imperialist drive to world war except socialist revolution. It is necessary to build a mass movement against war based on the working class and guided by a revolutionary program directed against the imperialist system and capitalism.

We appeal to workers and young people around the world. Join and build the International Committee of the Fourth International and its national sections—the Socialist Equality parties—to provide the leadership necessary to prevent another world war. Build the ICFI as the world party of socialist revolution.

Barry Grey

LIVER MACHINERY IN BRUSSELS

Wednesday 24 June 2015 17.00 EDT

Nato, in an echo of the cold war, is preparing to re-evaluate its nuclear weapons strategy in response to growing tension with Russia over Ukraine, sources at the organisation have said.

Updating Nato's nuclear policy would amount to an escalation in tit-for-tat exchanges with Russia since the Ukraine crisis erupted last year. Expressing concern over President Vladimir Putin's announcement last week that Russia was to buy 40 new intercontinental ballistic missiles, Nato officials also said there was alarm over Russian rhetoric on nuclear weapons and the extent to which such weapons are involved in military exercises.

A Nato diplomat said: "There is very real concern about the way in which Russia publicly bandies around nuclear stuff. So there are quite a lot of deliberations in the alliance about nuclear [weapons], but it is being done very slowly and deliberately. We need to do due diligence on where we are."

The issue is being discussed on the margins of a two-day Nato ministerial meeting that began in Brussels on Wednesday. But the US is keen to get the issue on the table and a meeting of Nato's ministerial nuclear planning group is likely to be held later this year - earlier than planned - to discuss refreshing the nuclear doctrine.

Among potential topics is an enhanced role for nuclear weapons in Nato military exercises. Also up for discussion would be how to better interpret Russian warnings about nuclear weapons: whether they should be taken seriously or whether these amount to no more than rhetoric. 1983

Speaking on the sidelines of the summit, British defence secretary Michael Fallon said Russia's "nuclear messaging is not helpful". He added: "It is important we understand its implications for the alliance".

Since the peak of the cold war, the US and Russia have slashed their nuclear arsenals but Russia still has an estimated 1,582 strategic warheads deployed on 515 missiles and bombers, while the US has 1,597 deployed on 785. There is no suggestion at Nato headquarters of a return to the days of nuclear arms races and the doctrine of mutually assured destruction, and the US has specifically ruled out returning cruise missiles to Europe. 844

But Nato officials, military and diplomats are raising worries that the US-led alliance's existing nuclear posture reflects the thinking of a decade ago when Russia was viewed as a potential partner. That strategy badly needed to be refreshed, they suggested. Although Nato nuclear exercises are classified, the organisation does, like Russia, conduct them. The concern at Nato is that the role of nuclear weapons in such exercises needs to be upgraded to take account of the changed relationship with Moscow. 2006

Nato's secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, speaking at a press conference on Wednesday, said the nuclear issue was serious and had to be treated with caution. "The nuclear activities, the investments of Russia in new nuclear capabilities, and the exercise activities by Russia in the nuclear domain is part of the global picture where we see a more assertive 12:42 PM

said the nuclear issue was serious and had to be treated with caution. The nuclear activities, the investments of Russia in new nuclear capabilities, and the exercise activities by Russia in the nuclear domain is part of the global picture where we see a more assertive Russia."

The American ambassador to Nato, Douglas Lute, briefing journalists in Brussels on Tuesday, said: "There is a general assessment under way in Washington and a parallel assessment here in Nato to look at all the possible implications of what Russia says about nuclear weapons, its doctrine and so forth, its pronouncements, its rhetoric, and what we actually see on the ground in terms of development and deployment." Nato, he added, had not yet reached any conclusions or decided on "what are the actions that are implied in our response".

Putin last week announced plans to purchase 40 intercontinental ballistic missiles and complained of US acts in eastern Europe as amounting to the most aggressive since the cold war. Russia argues that the expansion of Nato into eastern Europe and its courting of Ukraine has been a repeated provocation. *will?* *will?*

A Nato official said: "Deterrence, based on an appropriate mix of nuclear, conventional and missile defence capabilities is a core element of our overall strategy. We cannot go into detail on our nuclear discussions. These are internal, sensitive and classified matters. What I can say is that Nato continuously assess all aspects of Russia's military activities, including Russia's nuclear rhetoric." *"thru"*

A second Nato official said: "The Russian leadership is rhetorically lowering the threshold when it comes to nuclear weapons and this is something which should not be done. It largely wasn't done even during the cold war." *maybe*

BY SO.
"This kind of nuclear threat was something which we found quite surprising, quite negative and is something we believe should be avoided but we are closely examining it carefully as part of the overall examination of Russia's activities in Europe and how we at least in Nato must unfortunately react."

Fallon announced on Wednesday evening that the UK is to double its spending on training Ukrainian troops from £3m to £6m.